



Embassy of the United States of America



Road Trip USA



Vintage Cadillac cars decorated with spray paint and buried in the ground form Cadillac Ranch, a colorful roadside attraction in Amarillo, Texas. © lumierefl/Flickr

The lure of the open road is a favorite theme in U.S. popular culture. Immortalized in literature, music and film, the so-called Great American Road Trip is a rite of passage for youth seeking adventure and is also a popular vacation choice for families.

Traversing the United States by car is an invitation to enhance – or ditch – the standard tourist agenda and seek out some of the country’s most treasured

oddities: quirky local attractions that offer a glimpse at America’s lighter side. Every state boasts its own prized peculiarities. Here are descriptions of just a few.

Great Balls of Twine

No fewer than four contenders vie for the title of the “World’s Largest Ball of Twine,” an object that delights visitors with its utter pointlessness.

The oldest contender – located in Darwin, Minnesota – is billed

as the largest such object ever constructed by a single person. Francis A. Johnson began wrapping twine into a ball in the early 1950s and continued until his death in 1989. Measuring 12 meters in circumference and weighing 7,900 kilograms, Johnson’s ball of twine has become a source of civic pride. Townspeople celebrate “Twine Ball Day” every August.

Frank Stoeber, of Cawker City, Kansas, regarded Johnson’s ball

as a challenge and decided to start his own. He died in 1974 before surpassing Johnson's record. But the townspeople of Cawker City have adopted Stoeber's challenge as their own: Every August they hold a "Twine-a-thon" in which all are invited to add more twine to the ball. It now ranks as the world's largest and heaviest ball of sisal twine, currently weighing almost 8,165 kilograms and measuring 12 meters in circumference.

The third contender – in Lake Nebagamon, Wisconsin – is the project of James Frank Kotera, who started wrapping his twine ball in 1979. He continues to work on it, and by his estimation, the ball weighs 8,700 kilograms, making it the heaviest ball of twine ever built. Kotera's ball sits in an open-air enclosure on its creator's front lawn; it has a smaller companion, "Junior," made of string.

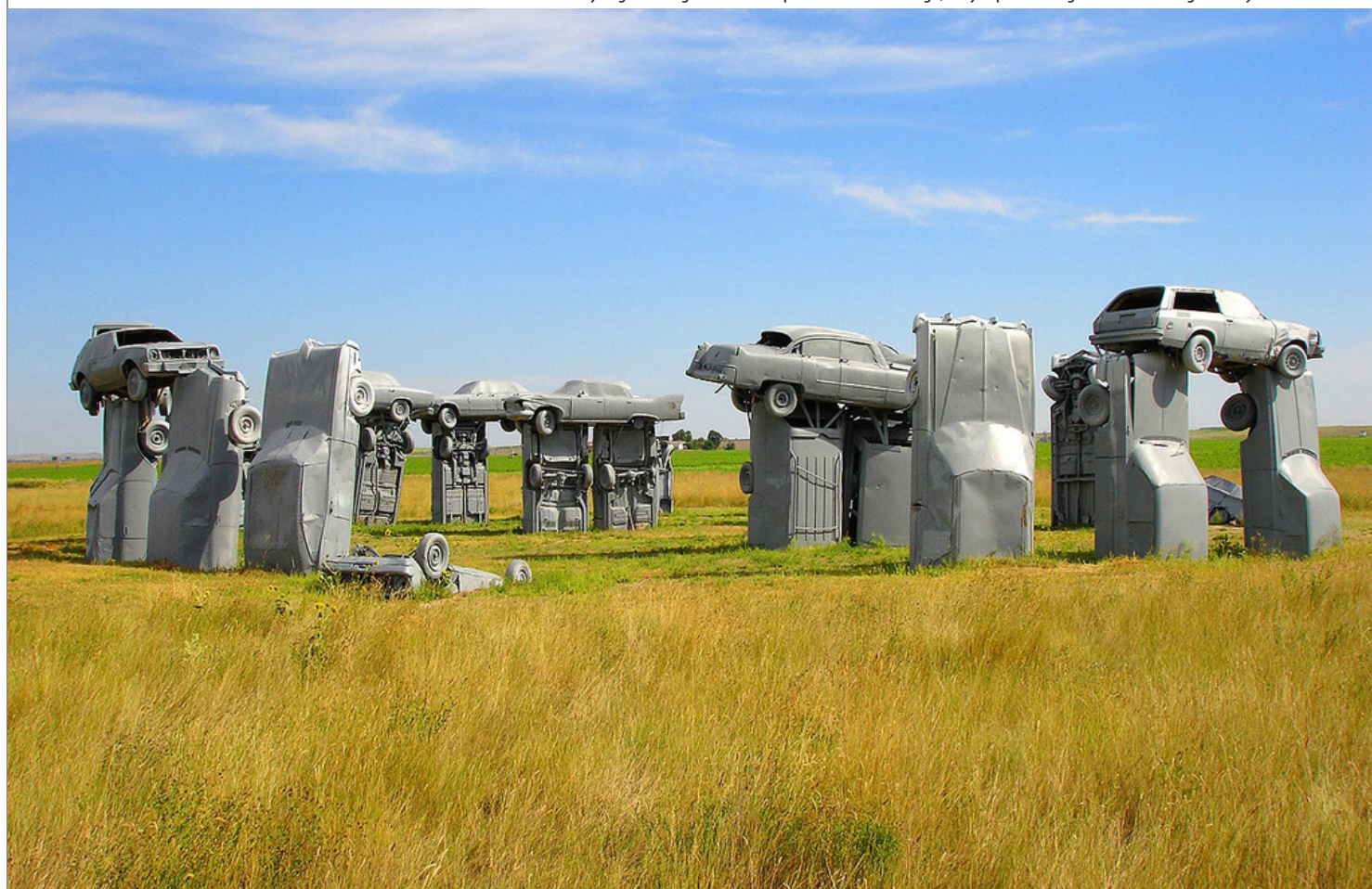
Not to be outdone, the town of Branson, Missouri, boasts its own ball of twine, allegedly certified by the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the "world's largest" (although this distinction might be fleeting, since the Kansas and Wisconsin balls are still works in progress). Owned by the Ripley's Believe It or Not museum, the Missouri ball measures 12.6 meters in circumference.

Car Culture

Americans' love of the open road and automobiles is expressed in a number of car-themed attractions. Two of the best known are Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas, and Carhenge near Alliance, Nebraska.

Cadillac Ranch — conceived in 1974 as a tribute to America's most famous luxury automobile — is a

Thirty-eight vintage cars make up Nebraska's Carhenge, a sly replica of England's Stonehenge. © Gaynoir/Flickr



tongue-in-cheek art installation of vintage Cadillacs in a row with their front ends buried in the ground. The cars' back ends, with tail fins pointing to the sky, form a permanent salute to America's automotive heritage. Visitors are encouraged to bring cans of spray paint to decorate the "sculptures."

Carhenge (ca. 1987) is a sly replica of England's Stonehenge (ca. 2400 – 2200 BCE), but in place of the stones that define the English prototype, its modern-day twin is constructed of 38 vintage American cars arranged in a circle. The cars have been spray-painted a uniform gray, mimicking the color of natural stone, and the entire structure sits in the middle of a grassy plain.

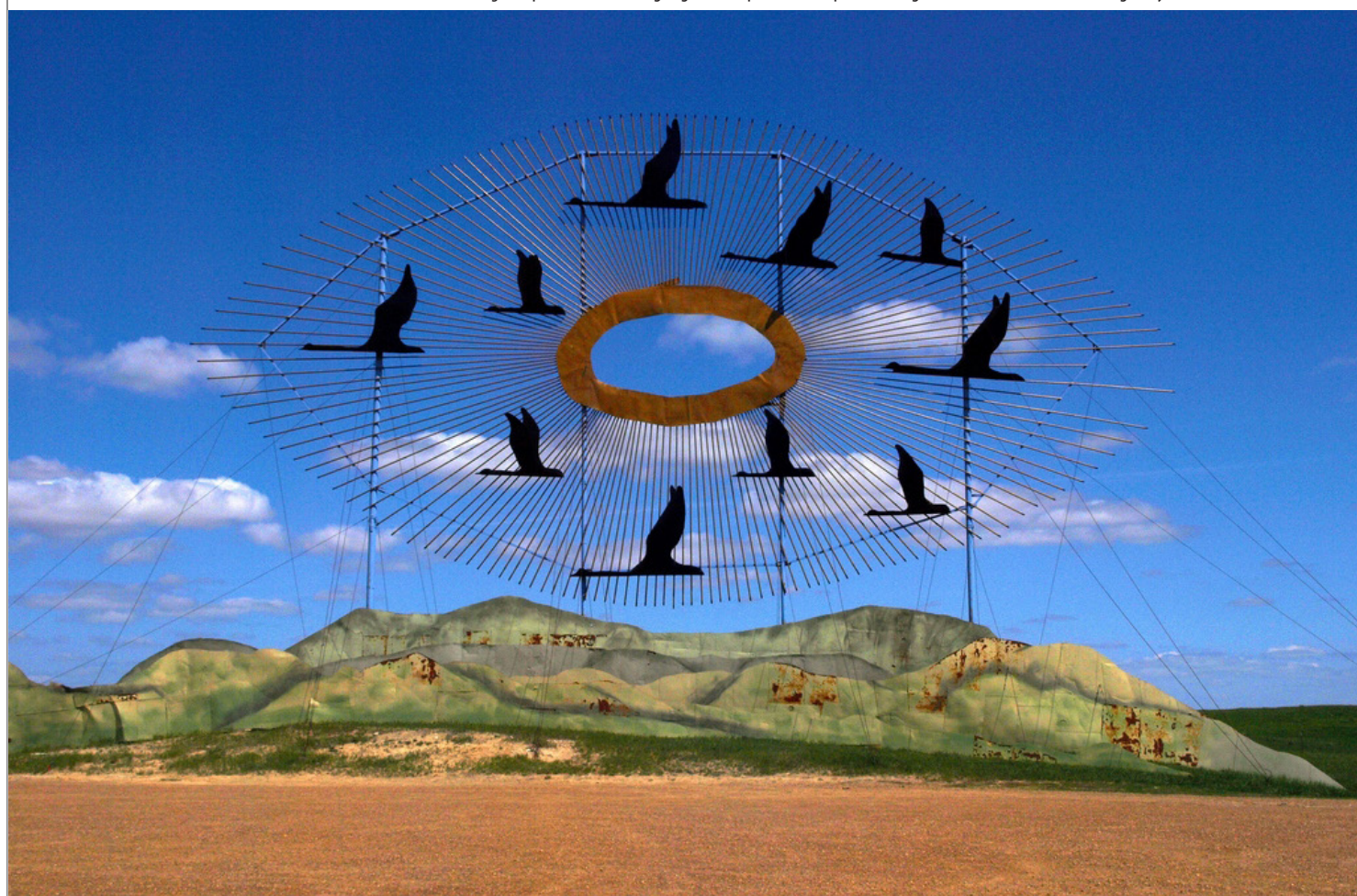
For tourists who prefer to stay in their cars, Dickinson, North Dakota's Enchanted Highway offers artwork

along the drive. Billed as the world's largest collection of scrap-metal sculptures, the Enchanted Highway includes eight giant sculptures – from *The Tin Family* to *Spider Webs* – stretched across more than 50 kilometers of open road.

Curious Critters and More

Popular landmarks across the United States often include giant statues representing real or imaginary figures. In Seattle, the ugly but much-loved Fremont Troll lurks beneath the Aurora Bridge, gripping a real Volkswagen Beetle car in one enormous hand. In Klamath, California, the Trees of Mystery site features unusual tree formations, and its entrance is guarded by statues of the mythical American lumberjack Paul Bunyan, who stands nearly 15 meters high, and Bunyan's sidekick, Babe the Blue

Geese in Flight represents one of eight giant scrap-metal sculptures along North Dakota's Enchanted Highway. © minnemom/Flickr





Seattle's beloved Fremont Troll lurks beneath the Aurora Bridge with a Volkswagen Beetle in his hand. © terratrekking/Flickr

Ox. Bunyan's mechanical right hand offers a sluggish wave and his "voice" (courtesy of a loudspeaker in his breast pocket) cheerfully greets visitors and answers their questions.

Dinosaur theme parks can be found coast to coast, but Dinosaur Land in White Post, Virginia, is a particular favorite of children. Huge fiberglass replicas of prehistoric beasts, some locked in mortal combat, populate the forested grounds. Not all the creatures are dinosaurs, however; a towering cobra, an outsized praying mantis,

a shark and a model of Hollywood star King Kong are part of the mix. The park's loopy "dawn of time" effect is heightened by a caveman diorama, located indoors.

An architectural folly known as the Haines Shoe House, located in Hellam, Pennsylvania, is a classic of roadside Americana. A 7.6-meter edifice that looks like a gigantic work boot, the house was built in 1948 as an advertising gimmick by Mahlon N. Haines, who owned shoe stores in Maryland and Pennsylvania. The three-bedroom Shoe House

features stained-glass windows with a shoe motif. Haines initially used the house as guest quarters for the elderly couples and newlyweds whom he invited for weekend visits; as part of this promotional stunt, he gave free pairs of shoes to his guests. Today, the Haines Shoe House is a museum; a shoe-shaped doghouse sits in the back yard.

These roadside attractions offer great photo opportunities and serve as a reminder to plan for some wonderfully weird detours when embarking on Road Trip USA.